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The

Desperate

People

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Robert Weaver reviews

THE DESPERATE PEOPLE

by Farley Mowat

Readers' Club January Selection

A few years ago Farley Mowat wrote **The People of the Deer**, an angry book about what had been happening to the remnants of an Eskimo people in the Canadian North. The book was angrily reviewed in a number of places across Canada. But there was an undertone of shock and guilt in many of the reviews. We knew that Canada's treatment of its Indian and Eskimo peoples was not exactly a source of pride, but Farley Mowat's first book showed us the appalling effects on one small group of people of a combination of natural disaster and the white man's misunderstanding and indifference. It reminded us that a bad policy, or no policy at all, may cripple or destroy human beings.

In **The Desperate People** Farley Mowat takes up once again the story of the remnants of the Ihalmiut—the People of the Little Hills. It's my impression that his new book hasn't created anything like the stir that followed the publication of **The People of the Deer**. It would be a pity if that meant that Canadians are arming themselves against further feelings of guilt about the Eskimo. Our policies in the North have greatly improved in recent years (as Farley Mowat notes), but official indifference, disease and the steady disappearance of the caribou still threaten the Ihalmiut with slow starvation and death.

"I urge every Canadian to read **The Deperate People**"—Hon. Alvin A. Hamilton, Minister of Northern Affairs, House of Commons, July, 1959.



When nature conspires against this band of Eskimo who live at the edge of extinction, and the white men are indifferent or simply fail to understand the situation, what happens to these kindly, lonely people is literally devastating. **The Desperate People** opens with a description of the country (the hard, treeless Barren Grounds), and with a brief history of the people themselves. But it soon becomes a series of chapters in which we watch the Ihalmiut struggle and die: an old woman slips away in the snow to relieve the family of one hungry body; families must decide which members are to starve in hopes that the others may be saved; despair forces some of the Eskimo back to witchcraft and naked violence.

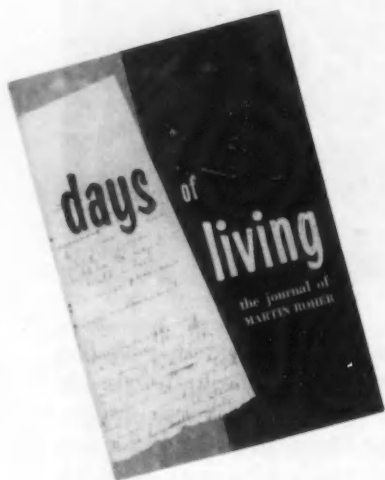
No one has told Farley Mowat about the virtues of understatement—or if he has been told, he didn't listen. His style is royal purple and no bones about it. It sets my teeth on edge, until soon I forget and begin to share his anger and passion. If royal purple suits, then let him wear it.

The Desperate People is a sombre and bitter poem about a tragic people.

THE DESPERATE PEOPLE is published by Little, Brown & Co. (Canada) Ltd. 305 pages. Endpaper maps. Woodcuts by Rosemary Kilbourn. Designed by Samuel H. Bryant. **The Desperate People** is published at \$5.00. **Readers' Club Member's Price** is \$4.00.

DAYS OF LIVING

by Martin Roher



Readers' Club January Alternate

Martin Roher was the younger son of Harry Roher, a well-known Toronto bookseller. When, in 1941, his older brother died in an air crash just before receiving his RCAF wings, Martin tried to enlist in the Air Force. He wanted to be a flyer, but he was rejected because of short-sightedness. Unwilling to accept this rebuff, he joined instead as a physical training instructor. He was seventeen at the time.

As a physical training instructor, his duties involved teaching swimming to potential commandos. Long and fatiguing hours in the water of the training tank led to an infection which developed quickly into nephritis.

Martin Roher was discharged in 1945 after a year in hospital. He was twenty years old at the time, and he was given six weeks to live.

He lived nearly ten years, with short stays at home and long ones in hospital. Sunnybrook, the hospital at the RCAF Trenton air base, the Mayo Clinic, and Duke Hospital in Durham North Carolina all had Martin Roher as a patient for longer or shorter periods. He died late in 1954.

Throughout his long illness, Martin Roher clung to two things. He clung to life itself, and he clung to his ambition to become a writer. Life eventually left him, but in a very real way he fulfilled his other desire through the posthumous publication of his journal, **Days of Living**.

Days of Living is a profoundly moving document. In it is found the sort of truth about life that most of us rarely see. Martin Roher treasured life because it might leave him at any moment. As a result, he thought more deeply about it, loved it more than most of us can imagine. And, in his thinking, he tried to solve for himself the eternal problems of man—the problems of meaning and religion, of experience and expression, of life itself. His solutions may not always be our own, but they are always fascinating, and often inspiring.

Judith Robinson has written an Introduction for **Days of Living**. She says, "With Martin pity was unthinkable; for this young Jew held beneath his bright armour of self-mockery the divine gift of grace. Moreover he was a means of grace to all who knew and loved him." Something of this gift of grace comes through to all readers of this remarkable book.

DAYS OF LIVING is published by The Ryerson Press. 145 pages. It is edited by Joseph Pollick and has an Introduction by Judith Robinson. **Days of Living** is published at \$4.00. **Readers' Club Member's Price is \$3.15.**



READERS'

NOTES



Our readers write letters: and here are some of the things they've had to say. Writing about **The Canadian Reader**, Mrs. R. S. Duggan of St. David's, Ontario, says, "I would not care for longer reviews and I enjoy occasional opinion articles. I would like to see all outstanding books drawn to our attention whenever possible, but realize this would be most difficult—perhaps every three or four months there could be a list of top books included in **The Canadian Reader**." And Sally Monteith of Ottawa recommends, "the inclusion of French Canadian as well as English Canadian works in your selections. After all, the French Canadian works are just as much a part of our Canadian literature as the English Canadian and I feel merit some attention." Let it never be said we don't take advice. Planned for next month is a round-up of outstanding Canadian books of 1959. And planned for some time during the spring (if we can arrange it) is an experimental offering of a French Canadian novel . . . we also accept compliments gracefully, like this one from Norah Hassard of Toronto: "Have just received my first Club books and want you to know that if future selections are as good the Club cannot help but succeed. However, I have one criticism to offer and that concerns the shape and size of the books . . . I like books to fit on my bookshelves in an upright position and no overhand. These two, **Eskimo** and **Architecture**, do not do this for which I am sorry." Ah well, it started out as a compliment!

And they write books too: At least four members of the Readers' Club have had books published recently, and we're happy (you might even say proud) to bring these to your attention. George Woodcock, who is also editor of **Canadian Literature** described here in November, has written **Incas and Other Men** (British Book Service, \$5.75), a travel book about Peru happily devoid of the usual euphoric enthusiasm of this kind of writing. J. Roby Kidd

has just seen publication of **How Adults Learn** (G. R. Welch, \$5.50), a survey of adult learning for teachers of adults which has been enthusiastically received in Canada and the U.S. Dr. Kidd is Director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education. Dorothy Henderson's **For the Greater Glory** (Ryerson, \$4.75) is a collection of revealing and inspiring biographies of men and women who have devoted their lives to their fellow human beings in a variety of ways. And Flornie Baxter Young of Peterborough has published **Songs From Kawartha** (Foulsham, \$3.50), a substantial book of verse, some light, some serious, with some charming emphasis on the delightful Kawartha lakes region in Ontario.

Canadians in Paperback: Morley Callaghan's 1951 novel, **The Loved and the Lost**, was issued by New American Library as a 50¢ Signet paperback in 1952. 300,000 copies were printed. Now a second edition has appeared on the newsstands in a new format. Quantity this time? 175,000 copies. Farley Mowat's **The Dog Who Wouldn't Be**, a very different book from **The Desperate People**, is now out as a Pyramid paperback at 35¢. New American Library is planning to do a paperback reprint of Hugh MacLennan's **The Watch That Ends the Night** in 1961. Paul Nathan in **Publisher's Weekly** reveals that MacLennan's best-selling novel has also been picked up by Hollywood for \$70,000.

Department of information you can't imagine how you managed to get along for so long without: after a test sale in Chicago, the first paperback printing of Nabokov's **Lolita** has been increased from 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 copies. Your local newsstands should be buried in **Lolita** sometime in January . . . Eight books were stolen at a recent American University Presses' exhibition in Chicago; one was a Phoenix paperback entitled **The Professional Thief** . . . Magazines, books and stationery accounted for about half of 1% of total supermarket sales volume in the United States in 1958. This was slightly above the total for spices and extracts, slightly under the total for pickles, olives and vinegar. Total sales of magazines, books, etc., \$115,000,000. They must sell a lot of pickles too.

RECENT CLUB SELECTIONS

The following recent Club selections are still available to members at the special member's price. Any or all of these titles may be ordered in place of or in addition to this month's selection or alternate.

FLAME OF POWER. Peter C. Newman's best-selling examination of eleven of Canada's most powerful businessmen. Lively and revealing, this collection of biographies of entrepreneurs is the first book of its kind in Canada. Published at \$4.95; **Member's Price, \$3.95.**

PORTRAITS OF GREATNESS. Ninety-six of Karsh's portraits of the world's truly great, reproduced in a book which has been called one of the finest ever printed. Very few copies left in stock. Published at \$17.50; **Member's Price, \$12.95.**

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ. The brand-new novel by Mordecai Richler, one of Canada's liveliest young writers ("a whole literary movement in himself" Robert Weaver). Duddy Kravitz is a Jewish boy growing up in Montreal, obsessed with a dream. Basically serious satire, **Duddy Kravitz** is also Mordecai Richler's funniest novel yet. Published at \$3.75 **Member's Price \$2.95.**

CONTEMPORARY CANADA. Miriam Chapin describes Canada to the Americans. "Certainly the most stimulating and assuredly the most controversial book about Canada published during this decade." *Montreal Gazette*. Published at \$7.50 **Member's Price \$5.50.**

FRONTENAC, THE COURTIER GOVERNOR. W. J. Eccles' brilliant debunking of a major historical figure. "The real Frontenac is exposed . . . whose contributions to the French Empire in North America were by-products of an unashamed desire to use his power as governor to line his pockets with beaver skins." *Canadian Literature*. Published at \$6.50 **Member's Price \$4.95.**

ESKIMO. Edmond Carpenter, Frederick Varley and Robert Flaherty combine to produce a handsome and many-sided explanation of the culture of Canada's Eskimo. With photographs, water-colours and sketches, all flawlessly reproduced. Published at \$4.95 **Member's Price \$3.95.**

A MIXTURE OF FRAILTIES. Robertson Davies' novel about a talented small-town girl in London. ". . . lavish with character and laughter, wise and perceptive about life and art, capable of touching the sorrowful as well." *New York Times*. Published at \$3.95 **Member's Price \$3.15.**

CANADIANS IN THE MAKING. Arthur R. M. Lower's vivid and lively social history of Canada. "With unmelodious aggression he rips into our coziest myths and our most hallowed traditions . . . a true glimpse of how the Canadian grew to be what he is today." *Maclean's Magazine*. Published at \$7.50 **Member's Price \$5.25.**

LOOKING AT ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA. In 232 pages and 137 plates, Alan Gowans presents the panorama of building in Canada with a masterly blend of urbane wit and scholarly thoroughness. ". . . so interesting that the reader can hardly lay it down." *Canadian Art*. Published at \$7.95 **Member's Price \$5.95.**

E. J. PRATT COLLECTED POEMS. New, enlarged second edition with introduction by Northrop Frye. "The richest and most substantial volume of poetry that Canadian literature has produced." *Toronto Star*. "Anyone can read his poems with pleasure or even excitement." *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*. Published at \$5.00 **Member's Price \$3.95.**

